

U.S. is planning for nuclear first strike option

WASHINGTON — Despite repeated denials over the years, there is secret evidence that U.S. military strategists are planning for a nuclear first strike option against the Soviet Union. The MX missile is an important part of this planning.

A credible first-strike force requires land-based, highly accurate missiles capable of knocking out an enemy's offensive missiles without serious retaliation. The United States could have such a capability by the early 1990s.

The story of our potential first-strike force is told in secret reports of the Defense Department and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. My associate Dale Van Atta has obtained copies of these reports.

One secret ACDA document includes a chart with

the candid title, "Outcome of Hypothetical U.S. First Strikes, 1993."

The chart incorporates some crucial assumptions into its calculations. For one thing, it assumes that the Soviet Union would "not launch out from under the attack" — in other words, that the Russians would, for some reason, not launch their nuclear missiles at the first warning of a U.S. attack or while our missiles were raining down death and destruction on them.

The equation also admittedly "ignores the impact of X-rays, neutron radiation, electromagnetic pulse, thermal effectives (and) possible problems of variations in yield, (accuracy) and reliability of U.S. weapons."

But with all these highly favorable — not to say

unlikely — assumptions, and an adjustment for only 100

MX missiles instead of 200, the secret projection indicates that after a first strike by our modified Minuteman III, Trident II and MX missiles, not a single Soviet missile silo would survive.

According to a recent Pentagon report, the Russians now have a total of 1,398 missile silos at various locations. Planners figure

on two U.S. nuclear warheads to take out each Soviet silo. These would have to be warheads with "hard target kill capability," meaning able to destroy steel-and-concrete reinforced underground missile silos. (In macabre nuclear parlance, "soft" targets are cities — and, of course, people.)

The best U.S. hard-target

missiles are 300 recently upgraded Minuteman IIIs, each carrying three warheads. That's enough — in theory — to wipe out 450 of the Soviet missile silos.

The Navy is developing a missile with the same capability, the D-5, for use in the Trident II submarine-launched missile system. The 150 D-5s planned will each have 10 warheads, for theoretical "kill" score of 750 Soviet silos.

Then comes the MX, a super-accurate missile

capable of dropping its warhead within 304 to 425 feet of a target. No known silo could withstand a nuclear blast that close. The MX missiles, with 10 warheads apiece, would put the United States over the top in destructive power. A secret disarmament agency report understates it this way: "The addition of highly accurate MX missiles would give the U.S. intercontinental ballistic missile force a much improved time-urgent hard-



Jack Anderson

target kill capability."

It's a matter of simple arithmetic: some 3,400 highly accurate nuclear warheads to aim at probably no more than 1,400 Soviet missile silos by the early 1990s. Those are the two missiles presumed necessary to take out each silo, with 600 left over to drop on the other "hard" targets, such as the Soviets' command-and-control bunkers.

Not so simple, of course, is what the Kremlin's reaction to this threat would be. As the ACDA report warns: The "synergistic effects" of Minuteman III improvement, Trident II and MX "could put a large portion of Soviet ICBM silos at risk, and together could have significant destabilizing effects and a negative arms control impact."

In short, the report warns, the Kremlin might not wait

docilely for a future U.S. first-strike checkmate. "Under extreme crisis conditions," the report concludes, "Soviet leaders might perceive pressures to strike first."

WATCHDOG OR LAP DOG? A feud between hospital management and the surgical staff at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Leavenworth, Kan., led to an investigation by the VA's inspector general that looks suspiciously like whitewash of management.

Dr. Mary F. McAnaw, chief of surgery for nine years, questioned an experimental drug-testing program involving psychiatric patients — and was demoted and transferred. Her charges — that she had been harassed for blowing the whistle — led to an IG investigation of 58 specific

allegations of "program mismanagement, nepotism, favoritism and retribution against employees by management."

In each case, the IG found in favor of management.

Rep. Pat Schroeder, D-Colo., read the IG report and wrote to Deputy VA Administrator Everett Alvarez Jr.: "For each allegation, there are facts in dispute. In every case, the Inspector General resolves the factual dispute in favor of Leavenworth management and then baldly states that the allegation is without merit."

Schroeder asked the VA to "read beyond the whitewash conclusions and try to find out whether there are allegations, having to do with the health and safety of patients, which should be dealt with, rather than covered up..."